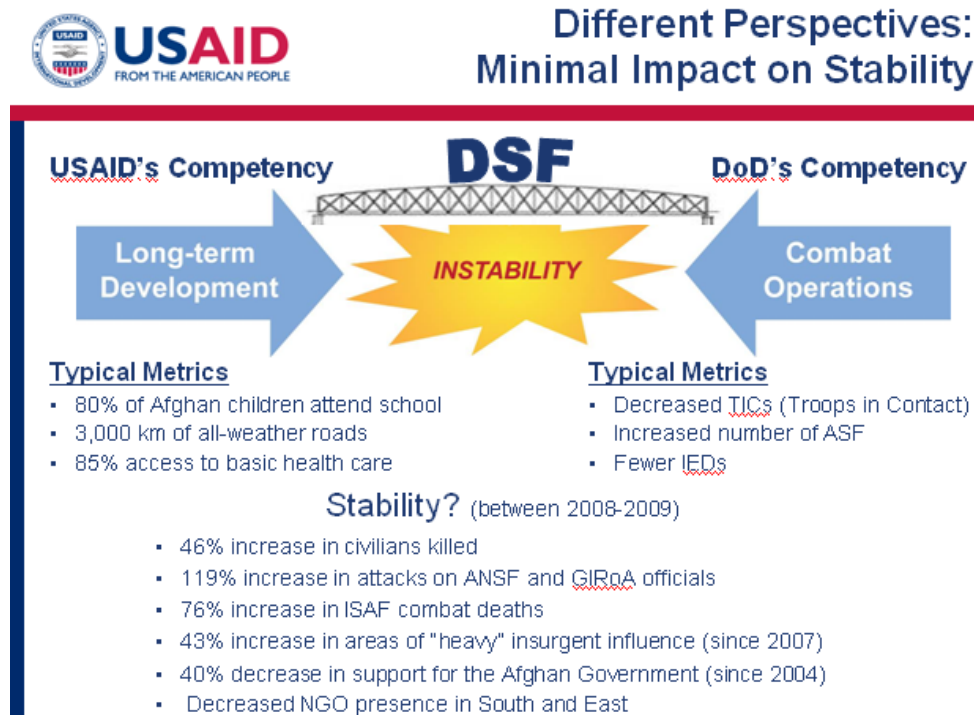


## DISTRICT STABILITY FRAMEWORK, USAID

To increase the effectiveness of stability operations, the Office of Military Affairs in U.S. Agency for International Development created the District Stability Framework (DSF). DSF was designed to assist civilian and military personnel in identifying the root causes of instability, developing activities to mitigate them, and evaluating the effectiveness of the activities in fostering stability at the tactical level (provincial or local). DSF should be used to create local stabilization plans and provide data for the ICAF, which has a strategic and operational-level (country or regional) focus.



## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Various USG entities involved in Stability Operations have different perspectives on fostering stability. For example in Afghanistan, USAID focuses primarily on long-term development. Typical metrics include number of children attending school, amount of roads built, percentage of the population with access to health care, etc. DoD is primarily focused on combat operations, and their typical metrics include IEDs, troops in contact, number of security forces, number of insurgents killed, etc. However, none of these metrics tell us whether an area is more or less stable. Since the population is the center of gravity in stability operations, planning and metrics must be focused on populations' view of the situation. DSF helps provide a common understanding of the causes of instability in an area and our effectiveness in mitigating them.

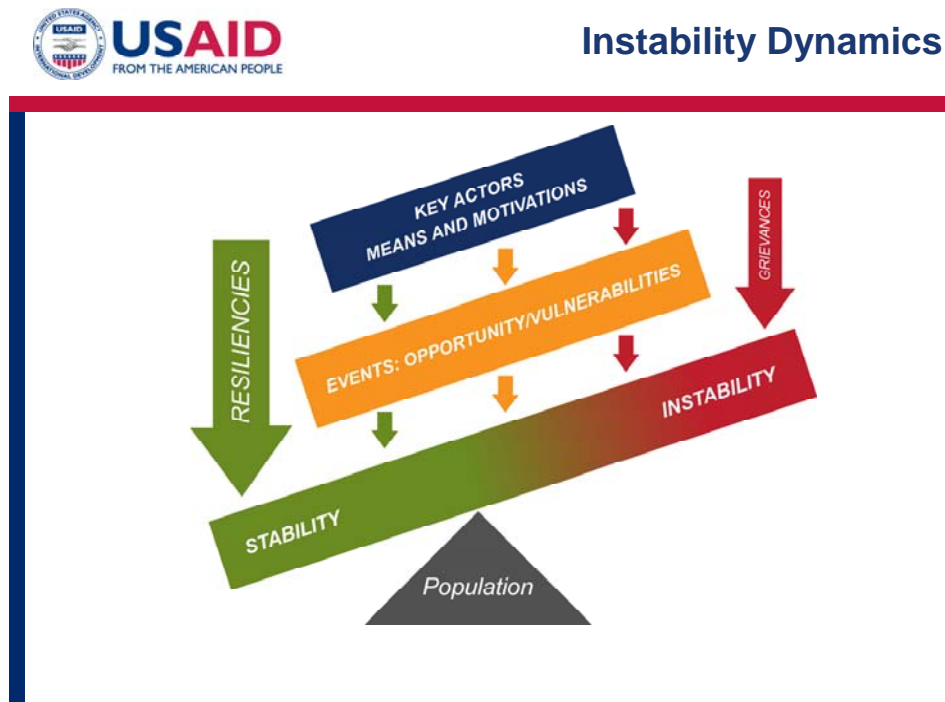
The DSF is based on the following four premises:

- Instability results when factors fostering instability overwhelm the ability of the society or government to mitigate them.
- Assessment of the local environment is necessary for effective targeting and strategic planning.
- The population's perceptions must be included when identifying causes of instability.
- Measures of effectiveness are the only true measures of success.

## Instability

Instability results when the factors fostering instability overwhelm the ability of the host nation to mitigate them. (See figure D-2) To understand if there is instability or determine the risk of instability, the following factors must be identified:

- Grievances
- Key actors
- Events - windows of vulnerability



**Figure D-2. Instability Dynamics**

**Grievances** are factors that can foster instability. They are the result of unmet expectations or the perception that individual or group interests are being threatened. Examples include ethnic or religious tensions, political repression, population pressures, or competition over natural resources. Grievances by themselves do not lead to instability. One billion people earn less than \$1 a day. Are they frustrated? Perhaps. Do they all pick up weapons and foster violence? No. Why? Because either they don't have the means to turn their frustrations into violence or the key actors (government or societal) can mitigate them.

**Key actors** are people or groups with the means and motivation to transform grievances into instability. In general, these actors gain power or wealth from instability. Drug smugglers or arms traffickers are actors who benefit from instability. Transforming grievances into widespread violence requires a dedicated leadership, organizational capacity, money, and weapons. If key actors lack these resources, they will not be able to foster widespread instability.

Even when grievances and key actors are present, widespread instability is unlikely unless an **event** links grievances to the key actors. Events are neutral - they simply occur. How they are prepared for or responded to determines whether an event (military operations, natural disaster, the death of a key leader, economic shocks, religious holidays,) will become a window of vulnerability or opportunity. As an illustration, an election can foster stability or instability. If an election is perceived as fraudulent, it will foster instability.

Even if grievances, key actors, and events exist, instability is not inevitable. For each of these factors, there are parallel mitigating forces:

- Resiliencies
- Key actors
- Events - windows of opportunity

**Resiliencies** are societal or governmental capacities which can mitigate the population's grievances. Examples include community organizations, an open political process, and/or accessible and legitimate judicial systems.

**Key actors** are people or groups with the means and motivation to mitigate grievances and foster stability. Just as certain key actors benefit from instability, other actors benefit from stability. An example could be a local imam mediating a land dispute between two tribes.

**Events** can turn into windows of opportunity if prepared for and/or handled correctly. For example, the tsunami in Indonesia changed the relationship between insurgents and the Indonesian government. The international community pressured both parties to work together to provide relief to the population. This cooperation led to a peace agreement which ended a 30 year insurgency.

While understanding these factors is crucial to understanding stability, they do not exist in a vacuum. Their presence or absence must be understood within the context of the local environment. Examples include geography, demography, natural resources, history, regional, or international factors. These factors do not necessarily cause instability, but they can contribute to grievances or provide the means to foster instability. As an illustration, although poverty does not foster conflict, poverty linked to illegitimate government institutions, a growing gap between rich and poor, and access to a global arms market can combine to foster instability. In summary, instability occurs when the causes of instability overwhelm societal or governmental ability to mitigate them.

### Assessment

Effective stability operations require identifying and prioritizing local sources of instability and stability. This means we have to differentiate between needs, priority grievances, and sources of instability.

A **need** is something which would improve the level of human development. Since most stability operations occur in less developed countries, there will always be a long list of needs. Examples include: potable water, educational opportunities, access to health care, infrastructure, security, justice, etc.

A **Priority Grievance** is an issue a significant percentage of *locals*—not outside experts--identify as a priority for their community. Examples include potable water, educational opportunities, access to health care, infrastructure, security, justice, etc. Needs can be the same as priority grievances. The distinction is (1) a matter of who identifies the issue – the population because it is a real concern for them, or an outside “expert” who assesses the situation based on common development models; and (2) whether a significant percentage of the population identify the issue as a priority.

**Sources of Instability** are usually a small subset of priority grievances. They are sources of instability because they (1) directly undermine support for the government, (2) increase support for spoilers, or (3) disrupt the normal functioning of society. Examples:

- a) A conflict between two tribes with one tribe allying itself with insurgents because the rival tribe controls the local government.
- b) Insurgents take advantage of a priority grievance (land conflicts) to gain/expand influence in the community by convening a Sharia court to resolve them.

DSF identifies sources of instability through a process which combines four streams of information (operational, cultural, instability dynamics, and local perceptions). Analysis often reveals the actual SOI is one or more steps removed from a grievance cited by the community. For example, in one case, locals cited water as a problem, but analysis identified the underlying source of instability as competition between two tribes over a well. In summary, the goal of stability operations is to identify and target the sources of instability, i.e. the issues which undermine support for the government, increase support for spoilers, and

disrupts the normal functioning of society. After an area is *stable*, we can address needs and priority grievances through traditional development assistance.



## Needs vs. Priority Grievances vs. Sources of Instability

**Needs:** things required to improve the level of human development. Exs: health care, education, infrastructure, security

**Priority Grievances:** an issue a significant percentage of **locals**—not outside experts—identify as a priority for their community. Exs: health care, education, infrastructure, security

**Sources of Instability:** issues locals identify which undermine government support, increase support for spoilers, and/or disrupts the normal functions of society:

- spoilers manipulate/settling blood feud
- corrupt police shake down locals

Another key part of assessment is understanding the differences between symptoms and causes. Too often, activities target symptoms of instability rather than targeting the underlying causes. While there is always a strong temptation to “do something” or achieve quick results, this is often counterproductive as activities either satisfy a superficial request or even contribute to increasing instability. For example, an assessment team in Afghanistan identified a “need” to reopen a local school. The team believed addressing this need would increase support for the government and decrease support for the Taliban. The day after international forces reopened the school, the Taliban sent the teacher a night letter, threatening his life. He left, forcing the school to close. A subsequent investigation revealed anti-government sentiment among the local population because the police tasked with providing security for the school were from another area. They established a checkpoint on the road into the village and demanded bribes for people entering the village. The local populace perceived the school, and the police which the government sent to protect it, as the source of instability. So instead of increasing government support by reopening the school, the project increased support for the Taliban. While the assessment team identified a need to reopen the school, they did not identify the source of instability in the area. Thus the project not only increased instability, it also wasted limited resources, decreased government support, and increased support for the enemy.

### The Population

Since COIN and stability operations are population-centric, popular perceptions must be systematically collected and incorporated into planning and operations. The DSF survey uses four simple, standardized questions to gather popular perceptions (see the Collection section below).

## Measures of Effectiveness

The only way to measure whether an area is becoming more or less stable is to use standardized impact indicators. Also called “Measures of Effect,” impact indicators measure the effectiveness of your activities against a predetermined objective. To identify impact indicators, ask yourself: “How will I know if the objective has been achieved?” Impact indicators are very different from output measures. Also called “Measures of Performance,” output indicators simply determine if an activity has been implemented. To identify output indicators, ask yourself: “How can I confirm the activity is being implemented or completed?” Impact indicators should be simple, accurate, practical and not too resource-intensive to collect. DSF uses the following indicators to measure stability:

1. *Civilian Night Road Movement*

Rationale: jingle truck drivers dominate the roads at night. Since their vehicle is usually the source of their livelihood, they will not knowingly risk it by moving at night if there is a high risk of IEDs, robbery, etc. Therefore, traffic movement at night suggests the area is stable.

Information sources: Intelligence, Surveillance, or Reconnaissance Assets, Patrol Reports

2. *Government Legitimacy*

Rationale: If people believe the government is trying to address their concerns, they will be more likely to support it and not insurgents. This decreases the likelihood insurgents will be in an area, suggesting it is stable.

Information source: DSF Question #3 – “Who Do You Believe Can Solve Your Problems?”

3. *Public Security Concerns*

Rationale: If people perceive security to be acceptable, this suggests the area is stable.

Information source: DSF Question #4 – “What Should Be Done First to Help the Village?”

4. *Population Movement because of Insecurity*

Rationale: Since the only tangible asset for most people in developing countries is their land, they will leave it only if their lives are in danger. Therefore, limited population movement away from an area, or conversely people returning to their homes, suggests it is stable.

Information source: DSF #1 – “Has the Population of the Village Changed in the Last Year?”

5. *Enemy Initiated Attacks of ANSF*

Rationale: The ANSF is easier to attack so if attacks on them decrease, this suggests there is less insurgent activity. Less insurgent activity suggests the area is more stable.

Information source: Intelligence

6. *Afghan Civilian Casualties*

Rationale: It doesn’t matter if an Afghan civilian is killed by the ANSF, ISAF, or the Taliban, s/he is still dead. If Afghan civilians are dying from military engagements, this suggests the area is unstable.

Information source: Intelligence

7. *Intimidation of Government Officials* (assassinations and/or night letters)

Rationale: If government officials are assassinated or receiving night letters, this suggests insurgents have a significant presence in the area, making it unstable.

Information source: Intelligence

It is important to note these indicators must be used together, i.e. they can’t be used in isolation as various perspectives are required to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the stability situation. It is also worthwhile to note both subjective indicators (based on the population’s perceptions) and

objective indicators are included. (See chapter 4 for a detailed discussion of the relationship among assessment, measures of performance, and measures of effectiveness.)

## THE DISTRICT STABILITY FRAMEWORK PROCESS

The DSF is an iterative process which focuses on the population as the center of gravity. Organizations using the DSF follow a continuous cycle of *see-understand-act-measure*. The DSF has four distinct, but interrelated phases:

- Collection
- Analysis
- Design
- Evaluation



## DSF - Methodology



### Collection

Collecting information on the causes of instability in an operational area is a two-step process. The first step is gathering operational, cultural, and instability dynamics information. The second step is surveying the local population. The DSF Survey has four questions:

1. Has the population of the village changed in the last twelve months?
2. What is the biggest greatest problem facing the village?
3. Who do you believe can solve this problem?
4. What should be done first to help the village?

1. “Has the population of the village changed in the last twelve months?” This question is important because people in developing countries usually don’t move unless there is a significant reason, as their livelihood and social connections are tied to the land. Moving away or coming back always indicates something significant.



2. “What is the biggest problem facing the village?” Giving the local populace a way to identify their grievances helps identify the sources of instability. It also lessens the likelihood intervening forces will make incorrect assumptions about what is important to the population. Note: this question does not ask people what do they “need” or “want?”

3. “Who do you believe can solve this problem?” This question helps identify individuals or institutions the population believe can solve their problems. Responses may include the host-nation government, a local warlord, insurgents, international forces, a religious leader, etc. If pro-government, these actors can be used to help stabilize an area and develop messages in support of strategic communications activities. This question also provides an indication of the level of support for the host-nation government, a key component of stability.

4. “What should be done first to help the village?” Encourages the local population to identify and prioritize their most important grievances.

A key goal of the collection effort is to determine the relationship between symptoms and the underlying causes of instability. Too often we focus on the manifestations of a problem rather than the reasons for it. A case study illustrates this point. A unit in Afghanistan conducted an assessment—which did not include the populations’ perceptions. It identified the lack of security as the main cause of instability in an area. To remedy this situation, the unit facilitated the placement of an additional detachment of local police in the area. However, since the assessment failed to identify “why” the area was unstable, additional police didn’t improve stability. A DSF assessment revealed the local police were the cause of the insecurity: They routinely demanded bribes from the population and/or discriminated against members of other clans in the area. By addressing a symptom of the problem rather than the cause, the “solution” actually increased instability!

In addition to surveying all segments of the population, collectors should also survey key leaders (traditional leaders, government officials, business leaders, prominent citizens, etc.) These surveys serve as a control mechanism. If the answers provided by key leaders match the responses from the local populace, it is likely the individual understands the causes of instability and can be used to help address them. However, if the answers do not match those of the rest of the population, these individuals may be either uninformed or part of the problem. DSF survey information is entered into a formatted DSF EXCEL spreadsheet. This allows the information to be easily analyzed to identify and prioritize the most important grievances of the population. (See figure D-3.)

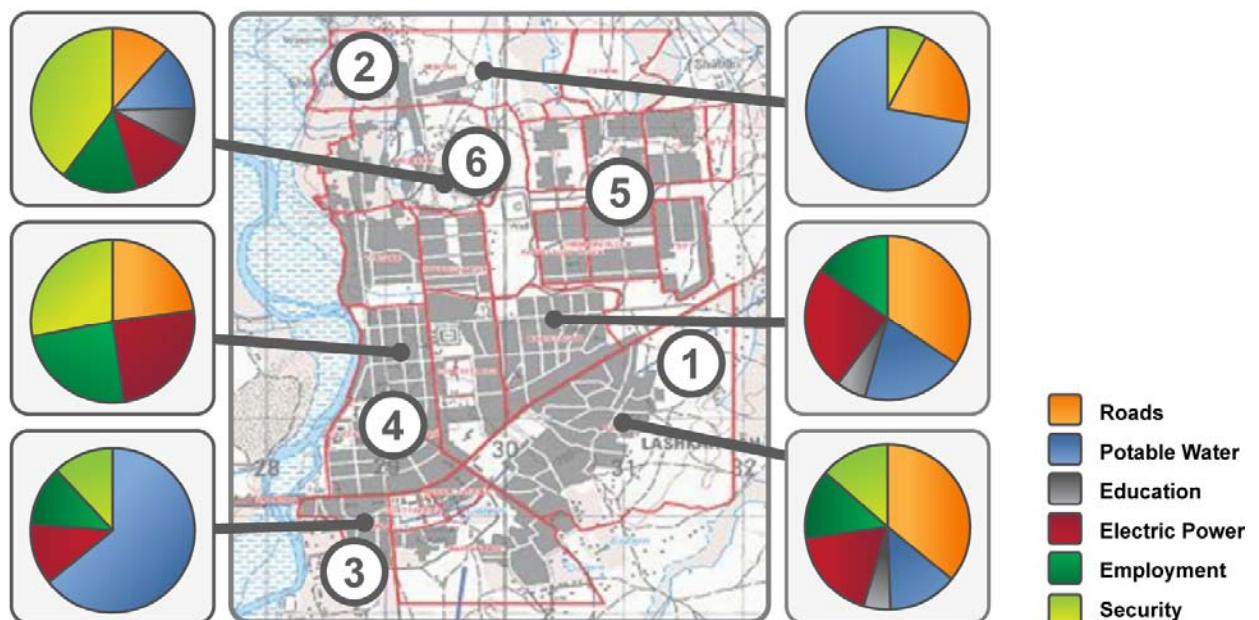


Figure D-3. DSF Survey Data (Priority Grievances)

## **Analysis**

The analysis phase of DSF combines operational, cultural, and instability dynamics with local perceptions to identify and prioritize sources of instability.

1. Operational Environment –information can be gathered with the PMESII and ASCOPE tools.
2. Cultural environment – is not simply a listing of the major tribes. We also need to identify the relationships between groups, their interests and values, traditional authorities and challengers to them, and how the insurgents may be leveraging those groups and relationships.
3. Instability Dynamics – are societal grievances and resiliencies, the key actors with the means and motivations to foster or mitigate instability, and events which may give those actors opportunities to advance their agendas.
4. The final stream of information is the local perceptions gathered with the DSF survey. Without the local population's perspective, we will fall into the usual trap of imposing our own assumptions on the situation and spreading our efforts/resources across a wide range of potential grievances. Local perception data helps focus our efforts on the population (the center of gravity) and what they think is important.

Combining all four streams of information allows us to not only identify the population's priority grievances; but also whether these grievances are a source of instability, i.e. are they decreasing support for the government, increasing support for spoilers, or interfering with the normal functioning of society. These are the issues upon which we want to focus our efforts!

## **Design**

Having identified the sources of instability, we are now ready to Design activities to mitigate them. At a minimum, we want to develop activities that measurably fulfill at least two of the following:

1. Increase support for the government. We might come up with a great program but if it is operated by USAID, it will not necessarily increase government support.
2. Decrease support for individuals or groups fostering instability. For example, you might have an idea for cleaning irrigation channels, but if it's not an issue being exploited by anti-government forces, it's not a stabilization problem.
3. Increase the capability and capacity of the local government and/or society to handle their own problems. This is crucial for our long-term exit strategy.

If a proposed activity meets these three "Stabilization Fundamentals," then we refine the activity by applying the Design Principles. These are drawn from USAID's Development Principles. They include

1. Sustainability
2. Local ownership
3. Short vs. long-term results
4. Leverage/support OGA, IGO, NGO, and HN programs
5. Cultural and political acceptability
6. Strengthens gvt accountability and transparency
7. Flexibility



		Analysis				Design		
Source of Instability	Causes (Perception)	Causes (Systemic)	Objective	Impact Indicators	Impact Indicators Data Sources	Activities	Output Indicators	Output Indicator Data Sources
Lack of <del>govt</del> traditional conflict resolution mechanism	Taliban provides swift justice  Judges support those who pay them the most  The elders can't solve our problems  There is no justice	Taliban justice is seen as fair  Justice officials are not paid in full/on time (RFI)  Traditional conflict resolution structures are undermined  Justice officials are not trusted	Foster conflict resolution mechanisms linked to <del>govt</del>	Increased # disputes resolved by govt. recognized entities  Decreased # of disputes resolved by Taliban  Decreased tribal violence  Decreased violence linked to land disputes	DSF Questionnaire  <del>Govt</del> records  Public surveys  Patrol reports  Interviews  Assessments	Facilitate judicial pay system reform  Establish a mobile dispute resolution unit  Facilitate <del>jirgas</del>  Link <del>jirgas</del> to government  IO campaign	Pay reforms enacted  Mobile dispute unit est.  # of <del>jirgas</del> held  # of <del>jirgas</del> with <del>govt</del> involvement  # IO radio spots	<del>Govt</del> financial records  interviews  <del>assessments</del>  DSF Surveys  Patrol Reports  Radio

**Table D-1. Tactical Stability Matrix**

To assist with the Analysis and Design phases, we use the Tactical Stability Matrix (TSM). It is simply a left-to-right process that helps ensure we think through the source of instability we are addressing before jumping straight to implementing activities. In brief, the columns of the TSM and their purpose are:

1. Source of Instability - a “bumper sticker” title for the source of instability we identified
2. Causes (perceptions) - the population’s view of the cause of the instability. This information is taken directly from the DSF questionnaire as quotes or paraphrased statements from the local populace.
3. Causes (systemic) – the root problems or issues that may lie behind the population’s statements. This step helps ensure we are addressing the sources of instability rather than their symptoms.
4. Objective – a succinct statement of what we want to achieve based on our analysis of the systemic causes of instability.
5. Impact Indicators – measures of effect that tells us whether we have accomplished our objective.
6. Impact Indicator Data Sources – sources of information which track the Impact Indicators
7. Activities – projects linked primarily to systemic causes. In some cases it may also be necessary to address symptoms (perceived causes), if only to help the population see near-term improvements in the situation.
8. Output Indicators – measures of performance that tracks the implementation of activities and progress towards their completion.

9. Output Indicator Data Sources - sources of information that enable us to track the output indicators.

The Tactical Stability Matrix and program activities should be the foundation for a local stabilization plan. It is nested within the higher headquarters plan and details how specific stability tasks will be integrated and synchronized at the tactical level.

### **Evaluation**

The DSF provides a comprehensive process for evaluating the effectiveness of our activities in diminishing the sources of instability and determining if stability in an area is increasing. We evaluate our activities at three levels:

1. Measure of Performance relates to the Output Indicators in the TSM. These indicators track the progress of an activity, and identify when the activity has been completed.
2. Measure of Effect relates to the Impact Indicators in the TSM. These indicators help us determine whether the activity achieved the desired effects. Responses to the DSF questionnaire are one potential indicator of effect. For example, if we are successful in addressing the targeted source of instability, we should expect to see fewer people citing this issue as their biggest problem in response to DSF Question #2.
3. Overall Stability – after a longer period of time, probably at least three months, we should step back and measure whether the net effect of ALL our activities has helped improve stability in the AO.

Evaluation is critical to measuring the effectiveness of activities in fostering stability and it helps ensure the views of the population are tracked, compared, and measured over time.

### **Benefits of the DSF Process**

The DSF process helps overcome many of the challenges to successful stability operations by:

1. Providing a common “sight picture” for various agencies and military units. This enables practitioners to focus resources on sources of instability
2. Measuring the impact of our activities
3. Improving their effectiveness through a focus on the center of gravity for counter-insurgency – the population
4. Empowering tactical units/stability teams by giving them hard data that can be used for decision-making at their level and influence decisions made at higher levels. It lets the tactical level drive operations, as opposed to the typical top-down approach.
5. Providing a simple, integrated assessment, planning, and decision-making process
6. Identifying strategic communications messages that actually resonate with the population. What better message than to say “We understand your priority problems and here is what we’re doing to address those problems.”

### **Best Practices and Lessons Learned**

Capturing and implementing best practices and lessons learned is fundamental to adaptive organizations. This behavior is essential in stability operations, where the ability to learn and adapt is the difference between success and failure. The DSF leverages this ability to overcome the dynamics of the human dimension, where uncertainty, chance, and friction are the norm. Examples of best practices and lessons learned through recent experience include:

- Activities and projects must be part of a process to change behavior or perceptions.
- Indicators provide insight into the effectiveness of activities by determining whether program activities are effective. (See paragraph 4-69 for a discussion on the role of indicators in assessment.)

- Measures of effectiveness must include popular perceptions.
- “Good deeds” can’t substitute for effectively targeted stability program activities.
- Activities should:
  - Focus on the underlying causes of instability
  - Focus on crosscutting issues
  - Identify and support key actors early to set the conditions for subsequent collaboration.
- Stability activities should not:
  - Mistake “good deeds” for effective action
  - Address “needs or wants”
  - Attempt to impose “Western” standards
  - Focus on quantity over quality

## **SUMMARY**

The DSF has been successfully used in the field to identify the causes of instability, develop activities to mitigate them, and evaluate the effectiveness of the activities in fostering stability. Since it measures the effectiveness of activities and stability across time and space, it is an important tool for conducting successful stability operations.